

online love

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by [andbutso](#)

Summary

George is daydreaming in English, skimming through the Sparknotes translation of Hamlet, when a bright red notification in the Zoom meeting pulls him back to reality.

From Dream (Privately): that hoodie looks good on you

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

George is daydreaming in English, skimming through the Sparknotes translation of Hamlet, when a bright red notification in the Zoom meeting pulls him back to reality.

From Dream (Privately): that hoodie looks good on you

He freezes. Cautiously, he flips through the participants, eyes landing on a blank screen at the very end, void but for the word “Dream” in big, white letters. His teacher requires them all to keep their cameras on; Dream is obviously breaking the rules, whoever they are.

Oh, well. George decides that it’s ultimately not his business. He’s a little surprised at the message, but that doesn’t mean he shouldn’t be nice. He types out a quick reply.

From George (Privately): thanks!

The response comes a few seconds later:

From Dream (Privately): :)

George bites his nails, grinning at the simple smiley. No more texts come for the rest of the period, and for some reason, he finds himself strangely disappointed.

He'd moved to the United States a few months ago, and he'd actually been looking forward to the change. Recently, though, more than once, he's finding himself cursing Covid-19 for ruining his last year of high school.

He's aware that it's the same for his friends back in Brighton, but he can't help thinking that he's got it worse. Sometimes, he gets calls and texts from them complaining about not being able to meet each other after school like they'd used to. George always groans and rolls his eyes. "At least you *have* friends," he'd joke, and they'd laugh it off over Facetime, but some part of him knows that it's true, that he hasn't made a single friend in the two weeks he'd been attending school virtually in America.

Now, however, maybe he's making his first friend. Dream seems kind enough; maybe he should give them a chance.

The next day, he clicks around in his other classes, searching for a certain participant. To his disappointment, he doesn't see Dream again until English. Sure enough, their camera is off like last time. George wonders why they aren't getting called out by the teacher.

Ten minutes pass, and no message from Dream. George decides to instigate their conversation. He takes a deep breath and places his hands on the keyboard.

From George (Privately): that hoodie looks good on you

From George (Privately): is what i'd say, but your cam is off again

From George (Privately): how come you aren't getting caught?

His eyes light up when Dream responds.

From Dream (Privately): oh, you searched for me last time?

From Dream (Privately): and i have no clue lmao. i've managed to get through all of my classes like this so far and none of my teachers have said a word

George frowns. So he could've had his camera off all along?

From George (Privately): do you think mrs. williams would notice if i turned mine off too?

From Dream (Privately): probably not

From Dream (Privately): but i like seeing your pretty face

George blushes. His finger hits the camera button, and he sees his video on the screen switch to his name. He's too flustered to reply to Dream's message, and he doesn't get any more texts from Dream for the rest of the period.

He's not sure why this one sentence, this compliment from a stranger, makes his heart flutter in his chest like a butterfly in a flower field.

He spends the rest of the night feeling guilty for leaving Dream on read. His mum notices him poking around his casserole during dinner, and she smiles at him teasingly. “You alright, George? Not having girl problems, are we?”

George scowls. “Something like that.”

She sets a glass of water down in front of him and winks. “Keep your head up, son. There’s nothing a little time and conversation can’t fix.”

George sulks more, but he considers his mum’s words. He’s so used to overthinking in shrouded anxiety, assuming something entirely false without even processing alternate situations. Maybe she’s right, and he just needs to talk to Dream. He doesn’t know anything about them, not even their gender or full name; in fact, they’ve had a total of two exchanges, but he doesn’t want to lose the one other person he’s been speaking with ever since school started. He goes to sleep that night lost in his thoughts.

In the morning, he waits apprehensively for his third period class. He’d written out a few ways to start the conversation last evening, and now, the paper sits at the edge of his desk, jostled ever so often by his leg, which was bouncing up and down with nerves. When English finally arrives, he logs onto the zoom with his webcam off, completely ignoring Mrs. Williams’ lecture about the relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia, and types a sentence for Dream.

From George (Privately): sorry for bugging out last time

He has his next pre-planned message already tapped out when suddenly, Dream replies.

From Dream (Privately): no biggie! hope you’re okay

From Dream (Privately): sorry if i said anything weird

George almost breaks his backspace button.

From George (Privately): it’s all good :]

Then, shakily, he types out another text.

From George (Privately): is dream a nickname btw? i wanted to ask last time but i don’t think i did

The response is almost instantaneous.

From Dream (Privately): lol yup it’s my minecraft ign

From Dream (Privately): i don’t think i’m allowed to use it on zoom, but here we are

From George (Privately): i suppose williams lets you get away with that too

From Dream (Privately): definitely. i’m her favorite child ;)

George smiles from behind the screen.

From George (Privately): wtf this is inequity

From Dream (Privately): whoa there george, watch your language

From George (Privately): LMAOO

The paper on his desk flits to the ground, long forgotten. He barely registers that Mrs. Williams is calling on people to answer questions. The coherent part of his mind really, really hopes that she doesn't pick on him; the rest of him is giggling too hard to form sentences.

He almost misses Dream's next message as he pulls Sparknotes back up on his laptop.

From Dream (Privately): can you turn your cam on?

George raises an eyebrow.

From George (Privately): what for?

From Dream (Privately): i want to see you

George gulps. He feels a slight tint creep up behind his ears, and his hands seem to move on their own.

From George (Privately): why?

From Dream (Privately): because you're pretty

From Dream (Privately): also because you wouldn't want to get in trouble with your teacher, now would you?

His heart is pounding; he can hear it in his head.

From George (Privately): alright, but only if you turn yours on as well

A couple of minutes pass with George waiting in silence, his only company being the bloodrush in his ears and his hammering heart. His anxiety starts to return, and he worries that he'd said something wrong when Dream finally replies.

From Dream (Privately): sorry georgie, i shall remain faceless at the present

From Dream (Privately): but maybe some other day

From George (Privately): aw...how are we supposed to fall in love now :(

He's not sure what prompted him to send the message, but no sooner had it left his fingers than Dream replied.

From Dream (Privately): i'm sure we'll find a way :)

“For the last time, keep your cameras on,” Mrs. Williams huffs, glasses sliding off her nose. “If I see one more blank screen, you’re getting virtual detention.”

George wriggles in his seat, feeling slightly guilty. Throughout the week, other classmates have started to notice him and Dream, and they’ve turned their cameras off as well. George knows that it’s technically not his or Dream’s fault, but he can’t help feeling like he was one of the instigators of this mayhem. For some reason, he thinks that Dream would laugh at him for being a goody-two-shoes.

Having no choice, George flips his webcam on for the first time in days. He scrolls through the list of participants and frowns when he doesn’t spot Dream.

“We’ll be starting our Hamlet presentations this class,” Mrs. Williams continues. “I’ll put you in a breakout room with your partner. All the directions are on Google Classroom.”

George realizes with a start that he has no idea what is going on, and he wishes, belatedly, that he’d paid more attention in class. He clicks the invitation to the breakout room when it pops up on his screen and mentally sends his partner a quick apology.

He finds himself face-to-face with freckles and tanned skin. *Clay*, the name tag reads, and George flushes slightly when Clay grins at him, locks of dirty blond hair falling in front of his green eyes.

“So, George,” Clay says, seemingly not one for introductions, “let’s get started, yeah?”

The remaining forty minutes pass by fairly quickly. George soon discovers that Clay doesn’t know much more about Hamlet than he does himself, and most of the tension leaves his shoulders. They spend a few minutes laughing about Old English speech (“Oh, I am slain!”), and George tells Clay about living in Britain when Clay asks about his accent. When they finally talk about the project, which required them to make a presentation on a hidden interpretation of the text, they find themselves discussing the homoerotic tension in the writing.

“It’s kind of...gay,” Clay remarks at one point. “And I’m saying this from the perspective of a bisexual man.”

George bobs his head, agreeing. “Hamlet literally says that he keeps Horatio in his heart above all other women. How is that not gay?”

For the first time in a while, George feels productive and generally *good*. They continue to work, and he’s almost sad when the end of the period comes.

“Bye, Clay,” he says, mouse hovering over the exit button.

“See you.”

He’s about to leave when Clay says something that makes all of George’s blood rush to his face.

“Oh, and by the way, George? You look good in that hoodie.”

His camera’s already on when he joins the Zoom on Friday. Immediately, he searches for Clay and right-clicks his video.

From George (Privately): hey

On his laptop, he sees Clay look up with furrowed brows, caramel hair dusting over his eyelids. It’s hard to tell with his protanopia, but he thinks he spots a tad of pink on Clay’s cheeks.

Clay’s arms move to the keyboard, and George gets the text a couple of seconds later.

From Clay (Privately): hey

Somehow, George knows that Clay’s watching him. He tugs his sleeves down and waves ever so slightly at the webcam. Clay’s blush spreads to his neck, and George smirks.

They don’t speak again until they’re separated into breakout rooms.

“So,” Clay says, laughing shyly, “I guess I have some explaining to do.”

"That you do," George replies, voice soft.

Clay reaches up and brushes his hair behind his ears. "Hi, George. I'm Dream."

George sees freckles and summer-green eyes, and he beams as brightly as the sun. "You know, Dream, I think my hoodie would look good on you."

End Notes

HELLO thank u for reading! i'm happy if you enjoyed (even if only a little bit <3)
kudos + comments are highly appreciated! it's free and you can always delete them if you want

also ! the reason why dream joined as "clay" that one time is b/c he changed his zoom name to clay after their teacher lectured them abt cameras and george just never saw it hhfjasdhaj he is (unfortunately) not psychic LOL

also also lemme know if it's hard to tell who's sending the messages hh i myself got kinda confused while writing lmaofmosfm

also also also sorry that our precious sappitus nappitus does not exist....:(

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